

EDITORIALS

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Bettering our own national treasure

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Liberty State Park in Jersey City is the most visited park in the state. Walk by the parking lot near the historic Central Railroad terminal and see license plates on vehicles that drive here from all over the nation.

Some use the park as a jumping off point to visit the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, and many continue to enjoy the surroundings and vistas from this glorious open space.

The amazing fact is that there is so much more of this park that has yet to be open to the public. There are 234 acres of woods, wetlands and salt marshes that are fenced off because of concerns about toxic materials left from when the area was filled with industrial waste.

Now \$20.8 million in federal funds has been authorized to restore these acres as part of a \$32 million project that will also use \$11.2 million in state funds to expand the park to the dimensions once envisioned by Morris Pesin, a former Jersey City councilman who started a movement to create Liberty State Park in 1958.

Along with the parkland that now exists, there are plans to create three areas of freshwater wetlands and a 40-acre salt marsh that will be formed by cutting a channel to the Hudson River.

Park hikers will also be able to take advantage of paths through another 110 acres of woodlands, and make use of bird blinds and viewing decks. Recreational opportunities will come from a 30-foot-high mound in the park that will be open for picnicking in warm weather and sledding in the winter.

A groundbreaking is planned for the fall, and construction should take about three years to complete. The project partners are the Army Corps of Engineers, the state Department of Environmental Protection and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

This newspaper agrees with U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez, who said: "Nature is not

something that should only be preserved in the national parks."

A legacy of Jersey City and its citizens, Liberty State Park is fast becoming not just a state treasure, but one that could easily be mistaken for an asset within the National Park Service.